

THE COUNTRY CHURCH.

One of the most remarkable documents emanating from a secular source is the report of the Commission on Country Life appointed by Mr. Roosevelt. It is published as a Senate document. Its remarkable feature is the manner in which it deals with the religious side of the problem of life in the country.

It analyses the fundamental conditions and treats of them under the heads of knowledge, education, organization, and spiritual forces. In dealing with the latter it disclaims any desire to give advice to the institutions of religion or to attempt to dictate their policies, but declares that any consideration of the problem of rural life, which would leave out of account the functions and possibilities of the Church and its related institutions, would be grossly inadequate, both because the problem is in its last analysis a moral one and because in the last development of the individual the great motives and results are religious and spiritual, and because from the sociological point of view the Church is fundamentally a necessary institution in country life, with such relations, springing from the closer connection of life and work on the farm, as to make the institutions and the life react on one another more intimately than they do in city life.

This is a most philosophical and practical position to hold, and the commission's grasp of the matter in the face of the usual attempt on secular sides to eliminate the religious and spiritual elements altogether is to be most warmly commended for bravery and faithfulness to the truth. The Church, the report goes on to argue, must be a leader in the attempt to idealize country life.

The desire to avoid giving advice, so clearly given in the introduction, does not prevent the report making suggestions in connection with a later section's study of "The general corrective forces which should be set in motion." Among these the first that is named is an effort to give up the superfluous church, or churches, in "over-churched" communities, and a process of co-operation, not necessarily organic union. Commendation is given of movements looking towards federation and effort that puts emphasis not on the Church itself, but on the work which the Church is to do for all men. Another suggestion is that the Church be more than it is now a social center, not so much as a place for holding social gatherings as a place from which influences may constantly emanate that will tend to build up the moral and spiritual tone of the community. Another is that there be a large extension of the work of the Young Men's Christian Association in rural districts, as an ally of the Church. Another is that there be a proper conception of the position of the country pastor, an adequate fitting on his part for the special conditions of the field, a combination between ministerial and agricultural training schools to produce such fitting, and a better support for the ministers in country charges.

Some of the findings of the commission may not commend themselves to the wisdom and experience of those who are familiar with the situation, but the document is well worth reading and from its view point

must be regarded as a most unusual and frank tribute to the value of the country church, the opportunity which it enjoys, and the honor that is to be placed upon the pastor who holds the responsible strategic position.

COMPARATIVE RELIGION.

For years the title, Comparative Religion, made an unfavorable impression. As used by some authors, it was an assault on the Christian religion. It assumed the religion of the Nazarene to be only one of many, to be the product of the evolution of the religions of the races of mankind, and like them to be without any supernatural character and divine authority. Like them it would be subject to development and modification and give way finally to other expressions of the religious wants and emotions of men.

It was not to be wondered at that science, reason seeking orderly statements of facts and relations, grasping at all other departments of human thoughts and experience, should lay its hand upon the religions of the races and the ages and attempt to ascertain the facts, origins, growth, relations, and, if possible, the principles in common of the various forms of religious expression. Some of the students of comparative religion have been wholly irreverent, materialists, rationalists; rejecting the supernatural, finding only natural evolution, and hopeless of any divine guidance and help.

But there are others who, with a sincere sympathy for humanity, have studied the religions of so many kinds, and have seen in the religion of Christ not only a final answer to the questions all men have asked, but the one supreme revelation from God of a way of life, bringing to men grace for the life that now is and glory for that which is to come.

The study of the religions of the world, some of them having a lofty reaching up to sun and stars, to light and air, or seasons and the passing years; some of them looking down to the winter of the field, and to serpent and reptiles and poisonous scorpions; some of them finding spirits to worship, and profitable in all things above and beneath; such a study is full of interest and of the deepest pathos. It is a vast and varied picture of the soul of man groping blindly for light and peace, "seeking rest and finding none." In all the range of human knowledge there is nothing so profoundly pitiful as the history of the struggles of all the races and families of mankind to express the wants and desires of the spirit within, and find rest—answer for the universal questions—peace for the troubled conscience and hope of another and happier life.

There is nothing to be regretted in the study of comparative religion, so long as it is the gathering of the facts of human history and the orderly array of these facts, with the comparison of all the forms and modes of worship found among the divisions of the human race. On the contrary, there are many things of importance to be learned, things that reveal universal, moral and spiritual conditions, and emphatically confirm the teachings of our revealed religion and the Word of God. Everywhere, among nations civilized and savage,